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Reporting to Parents

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REPORTING TO PARENTS

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Preface

Few issues pertaining to public education have given rise to so much discussion, conflicting opinion, and heated debate in our era as that of the home-school relationship, particularly in regard to the type of report card brought home by the child, and the ways and means used by the teacher through the medium of the report card to report pupil progress to the parent. Much has been written pro and con not only by educators and parents but also by other citizens who have felt the need or the urge to speak their minds.

It is the aim of this study to establish the purposes of reports to parents and to tell something of the history and present trends of reporting to parents. An attempt is made to illustrate the effects of reports on the school, the teacher, the parent, and the children. Problems involved in changing methods of reporting to parents will be presented as well as the relation of school records to reports to parents. The writer will indicate something about what should be reported to parents, when and how reports should be made, and the various media for conveying information that may be used by the school. Procedures for improving and evaluating reports to parents will be discussed. Some recommendations for improving the reporting of pupil progress

in schools will be presented. A bibliography is given to establish the authenticity of the material used in this study.

The points presented in this paper are supported by what is believed to be some of the best thinking on the subject by individuals and groups, representing the honest and sincere beliefs, hopes, and fears of those who seem to be best qualified to speak and most vitally concerned in children's growth, learning, and development. It was found that the more one reads what has been written on this subject the more interesting and complex it becomes. In many instances present methods of reporting to parents have appeared to be inadequate.

In an era when, apparently, the growing complexity of society has gradually been forcing homes and schools farther and farther apart, there is an urgent need to take measures to bridge the ever-widening gap, by evaluating the best means possible for bringing together the school and home, and for setting up the frame work necessary to put those means into actual practice. "Home and school must supplement each other; they must make a consistent impact. The teacher should be a skilled team worker, in constant touch with his coeducators in the home."[1]

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1. James L. Hymes, Jr., Effective Home-School Relations (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1954), p. v.

The task of bridging the gap has been satisfactorily accomplished in many cases. It is the fervent desire of all who are concerned that these cases may be multiplied many times in many schools in the not too distant future.

CHAPTER I

THE IMPORTANCE AND PURPOSE OF REPORTING TO PARENTS

There is no conflict of opinion that reports to parents concerning their children ought to be made by their school. There is, however, a wide divergence of ideas and opinions at the present time among educators and parents as to what should be reported and especially what form this report should take. A growing dissatisfaction on the part of many educators with the traditional system of school marking on an absolute scale and an uneasiness felt by parents over some of the newer methods so strange to most of them in light of their past experiences have clouded the atmosphere of home-school relations, producing a strained feeling of unrest. Amid the confusion and clouds that have long obscured the issue, the light is beginning to break, and teachers and parents alike are beginning to clarify their thinking on what is involved in adequate reporting to parents and the best means of making such reports. "Parents are desirous of having their children well prepared in those fundamental learnings that are essential to intelligent, effective citizenship. The school, too, shares that desire. It is our responsibility, however, to make our purpose and our program so clear to parents

that they will come to understand that academic goals alone are not sufficient to give breadth and depth to the child's education."[2]

An adequate progress report, theoretically speaking, must necessarily include more than an evaluation of book learning commonly called academic achievement. It recognizes that children are growing in many ways and the report should reflect that fact. Increasing interest is now being shown in the quality of the progress children are making as well as in the kind of learning activity children need and have in their school. Unfortunately there is a great lag still existing between practice and theory. Every conscientious teacher and informed parent must be making definite strides toward making practice catch up with theory and thereby reduce the lag.

Every child must eventually establish satisfactory relationships with the world outside himself. He must also come to understand his world within himself, his hopes and longings, his abilities and his shortcomings. When the child's world becomes too confused and complicated there must be an understanding adult--parent, teacher, religious

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2. Hannah M. Lindahl, "We Understand Each Other's Goals," Reporting on the Growth of Children, Bulletin 62, Association for Childhood Education, International, (Washington, D.C., 1953), p. 15.

counselor, or all three--to help him find his way again.

Wise parents and helpful, understanding teachers, as together they study the child, will recognize his need for many meaningful experiences with the world of nature and of man around him. But they will also sense his need to explore and discover himself. Together they will seek to keep his experiences interesting and rewarding, and within the limits of his capacity to explore and achieve. In order to do this they will seek to understand the goals considered normal for his growth stage and for his own individual needs and interests. The very young child can assume little responsibility for himself. As he grows up his share of the burden necessarily becomes greater and that of the parent and teacher becomes less.

How may parents and teachers best work together? Since the aim of both is a common one, namely that of assisting a child in growing up in a manner commensurate with his ability and interests to an adulthood that is satisfying to himself and an asset to the community in which he lives, it clearly follows that both groups should and must work closely together. Each has much to contribute toward the total understanding of the child as a human personality. The parent may aid the teacher, and the teacher the parent in bringing to bear all the light possible

on the child's needs, interests, abilities, and longings. There are ways of working together. Those ways are not one-way streets in which the teacher does all the reporting. Where there is a friendly and cooperative relationship between teachers and parents, the teachers will find that the contributions parents can and will make to assist the teacher in understanding their child will greatly enrich the teacher's effectiveness and success.

Not only should parents and teachers work together, but the pupil also should have the chance to participate in planning his program and evaluating his progress. Lois Clark puts the matter in this way: "Involving them all in full partnership, limited only by the ability of each to participate, is not only appropriate--it is essential to the fullest achievement of the goals of the school, the home, and the child himself."[3]

The importance of both parents and teachers knowing and realizing what is involved in reporting to parents cannot be stressed too greatly. The purpose can only be that of better understanding the total needs, problems, and abilities of the child concerned, leading toward a

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3. Lois Clark, "Together Parents and Teachers Study the Child," Reporting on the Growth of Children, Bulletin 62, Association for Childhood Education, International, (Washington, D.C., 1953), p. 9.

more intelligent and sympathetic guidance of the child in the task of growing up. The matter of close and wholesome home-school relations is so important that schools the nation over are giving it earnest and constant study.

CHAPTER II

HISTORY AND TRENDS IN REPORTING TO PARENTS

> In primitive tribes there was no need for parents and teachers to plan ways of working closely together. Home and school were one. The teachers were the mothers and fathers, the older children, uncles, aunts, and grandparents, all under the same roof. When other members of the community took a hand, as they often did, theirs was an extension of the hand of the family.
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> The curriculum was the life of the family and the life of the community. Manners and morals, skills and facts seeped in while work was done, food prepared, and thoughts exchanged. The youngsters were immersed in this education as were their many teachers. No separation existed anywhere.[4]

However, times continued to change as social forces and scientific developments made the home inadequate to supply all that man needed to know and to provide the experiences man had to have for effective living in a complex world. The American home was no longer equipped to be the sole center of learning. As schools were gradually established parents wanted to know how their children were progressing. The teacher frequently boarded with the parents of one of the pupils and knew intimately all the other parents. Most of the actual pupil reporting was by word of mouth about the fireplaces in the homes of

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4. Hymes, op. cit., p. 1.

the district. The items reported were usually teacher responses to what parents wanted to know about their children in school. Later written reports began to develop and parents were receiving nicely decorated slips of paper with such statements as, "John has excelled his own record" or "John has exceeded the abilities of others in his class."[5]

It was in those days that the traditional system, as it is now termed, was developed. The percentage method of reporting was used exclusively for a number of years. In time many educators began to think that it was almost impossible to evaluate children's achievements as closely as was demanded by this system. As a result the ABC system arose whereby an A gave a student a rating of 90 - 100; B, 80 - 89; C, 70 - 79; D, 60 - 69; and an F stood for failure. Much later came the simple satisfactory or unsatisfactory report card.

Today many educators regard the ABC system as being too competitive and not geared to individual differences. Many modern educators feel that no child should compete with another. Hannah M. Lindahl states this point of view admirably as follows: "To measure the child's growth in

5. Edgar W. Knight, "Mile Stones in American Educational History," N.E.A. Journal, 42:96-97, February, 1953.

terms of achievement of other children is to deny the principle of individual differences. How much growth is the individual child making in terms of his own capacity for growth? That is the crucial question."[6]

Somewhere between the traditional system of ABC grades and the mere S and U for Satisfactory and Unsatisfactory are many other kinds of reports to parents which have come into use as substitutes for or supplements to the traditional system. They have been devised by earnest educators seeking a more effective way to report pupil progress. Ida B. DePencier[7] lists some of these ways:

1. Use of formal report card, personal visits, and telephone conversations.
2. Check lists.
3. Narrative type.
4. Personal letter.
5. Personal conference.
6. Pupil evaluation.

These and other means will be discussed as to their merits

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6. Lindahl, op. cit., p. 17.

7. Ida B. DePencier, "Trends in Reporting Pupil Progress in the Elementary School," Elementary School Journal, May, 1951, p. 520.

and drawbacks in a later chapter.

The newer trends of reporting had their roots in the efforts of William Heard Kilpatrick who took a stand against the traditional report cards as early as 1892. In Blakley, Georgia, where Kilpatrick first started to teach, he abolished the traditional report card in his second year and an informative letter was sent to parents. In the third year even the letter was stopped. There were no reports sent out and parents were informed that if anything developed, it would be discussed with them. Even at that early date Kilpatrick advocated that there should be no comparison of one student with other students. From then until now the battle of the report cards has been waged with many frank expressions of opinion, with some extremists even advocating today a return to the traditional methods of reporting. In a recent popular magazine article, Howard Whitman[8] attacked the new type of reporting to parents and cited several instances in which individual schools had experimented with other forms of reporting and then had returned to the ABC system. In one Colorado case, a 1950 public opinion poll and survey produced the change

8. Howard Whitman, "Report Cards: AGFU, SMUX or ABC?", Collier's Magazine, 134:39-84, September 17, 1954.

back to the traditional card. Mr. Whitman further stated that the schools of Memphis, Tennessee, use a report system practically unaffected by the more progressive trend because they had tried another means, found it was ineffective, and abandoned it in twelve weeks.

At the present time conflicting opinions still exist as to the relative merits of each and all of the newer trends in reporting pupil progress. Out of the heated discussions eventually will emerge a form of reporting that combines the best of the old system with the improvements gained from the newer devices, which will be flexible enough to be usable, and one whose merits will be recognized by parents and teachers alike. The new day is dawning, but parents and teachers are still feeling their way in semi-darkness until such a time when enlightened public opinion and clarified thinking on the matter bring the light to its zenith.

CHAPTER III

EFFECTS OF REPORTS TO PARENTS

Report card day! What memories and emotions those words evoke in the minds of parents, teachers, and children! Many parents recall from their own experiences that report card day presented a crisis to those children who were not academically gifted. Comparisons of grades of two or more children in the same family many times led to feelings of inferiority or superiority. From unfavorable comparisons feelings of dislike for school and feelings of jealousy often developed. These negative attitudes were a seedbed for antisocial qualities and unpleasant personality traits. Unfavorable comparisons to the exclusion of all other kinds of reporting frequently destroyed a child's self-confidence and self-respect, lessening his desire and effort to learn. Report-card day has always had such far reaching results that it is still a perennial source of material for cartoonists and humorists.

By contrast, M. Harbage describes as follows desirable teacher-pupil-parent relationships: "Probably the most important factor in the modern practice of evaluating children's progress is that it creates a friendly three-way partnership between parents, child, and teacher.

And how good it must be for a child to think, 'My Mother and Father and my Teacher and I like one another--and they are all interested in me!'"[9]

All children and youth need to be encouraged and inspired by adults in order that they may make maximum progress. Frequently faith of the child in himself has to be renewed by encouraging words of parents and teachers, and these words of encouragement act as a stimulus to greater efforts. These words of encouragement can be given in the newer kind of progress reports. Gradually the child realizes his own capacities and abilities and learns not to expect to excel in every area. He becomes aware of his limitations as well as his strong points, and in the modern world of specialization it becomes increasingly important to know where one may succeed or fail.

Mary White says that when parents receive a report with only a few letters or numerical grades, they may with all justification ask these questions:

"Does this really tell me what my child is doing in school?

Does this tell me if my child is working according

9. M. Harbage, "Judging Their Progress in School," National Parent-Teacher Magazine, 47:30, February, 1953.

to his ability?"[10]

Some reports make provision for comments from the teacher. However they may still be lacking essential information. They may impress the parents but still leave them wondering about the child's progress. Sometimes the lack of understanding on the part of parents as to how to interpret a report card may mean that good report forms are being used without getting the results desired.

There is general agreement that a child should acquire confidence in himself and in his ability to succeed, and that he should develop wholesome attitudes towards others as well as strong feelings of social responsibility. These character traits are probably deeply influenced by the use of traditional report cards. Undesirable influences are brought to bear on a child who consistently receives a high mark and yet knows he has not done his best. Likewise undesirable influences affect the child who always gets low marks no matter how hard he works.

Available evidence seems clearly to show that relations between parent and child, and teacher and pupil, could be improved by some type of report other than the traditional one. According to Clare R. Rasmussen,

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10. Mary White, "Report Forms," Reporting on the Growth of Children, Bulletin 62, Association for Childhood Education International, (Washington, D.C., 1953), p. 32.

"Wherever this has been tried there has been improved relationships and it has enabled teachers and parents to exert more effective influence in stimulating and guiding the educational and emotional development of the child. It fosters in the school and home a more wholesome and desirable atmosphere in which children can live and practice positive traits of character leading to higher scholarship and qualities of citizenship."[11]

In a bulletin on Reporting to Parents, Ruth Strang says:

> Reports to parents can be one of the most useful instruments for the personalizing of education and the guidance of pupils. Even in their present form teachers' marks and other means of evaluating pupil progress are important because they have important effects. They influence the pupil's idea of himself--they often determine whether he regards himself as a failure or as a success. Moreover, they influence the parents' attitude toward the child and the school. Whether the school intends it or not the items on the report cards serve as goals for the pupils and influence the parents' idea of the relative importance of different kinds of school achievement. . . Reports that show the progress of the class and the individuals in it give the teacher new insights into his method of teaching and thus lead to improved instruction. . . Reports to parents may help to increase mutual understanding, good will, and cooperation in the school, the home, and the community, and may aid in child and adolescent guidance.[12]

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11. Clare R. Rasmussen, "What We Do--How We Do It--Why?", Reporting on the Growth of Children, Bulletin 62, Association for Childhood Education, International, (Washington, D.C., 1953), p. 35.

12. Ruth Strang, "Reporting to Parents", Bulletin Number 10, (Teachers College, Columbia University), page 1, 1947.

Numerous newspaper headlines have recorded instances of youngsters who, because of a bad report card, ran away from home, and in some cases even committed suicide. Elizabeth Pope[13] recently stated that if a youngster brings home an ABCD report card, the parent will know the minute the child gets through the door what kind of a mark he has received and how he ranks with the neighbor's children. She also points out that high marks may not necessarily mean that the child is doing his best and low marks may not indicate that he is failing to work up to capacity. Miss Pope further states that parents are very much concerned with the effects of reports on children. Jane may bring home A's and be cocky. But Jane did very little work for her marks. John worked hard, received lower grades, and is discouraged. She poses the question as to who will be the best product of the school program, Jane or John.

The reporting period is a trying time for most teachers. The possible misunderstandings and repercussions that may develop, plus the time required to make the reports, usually after regular school hours, contribute to the stress and strain characteristic of the report period.

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13. Elizabeth Pope, "Report Cards," McCall's Magazine, February, 1955, pp. 39-82.

The teacher should endeavor to make the report as objective as possible. Since she is human, her judgment may be colored by her personal feelings. In order to avoid this condition as much as possible, the teacher may use standardized tests and anecdotal accounts. The teacher may relate incidents pertaining to a particular student without herself drawing any conclusions from these incidents. She might place a written statement such as this in the cumulative record: "Today Johnny kicked Susie on the leg as they were passing from Music class to their own room." All of this would involve a lot of time and work on her part. However, the satisfaction that comes from a job well done is a compensating reward for the extra working time involved.

CHAPTER IV

PROBLEMS INVOLVED IN REPORTING TO PARENTS

Any change in an established method of reporting to parents has its difficulties for the administrator, the teachers, the parents, and the children. On the whole, people are reluctant to accept change and have grave doubts about new ideas. We like what we know best, and most adults know best the earlier forms of reporting. Both parents and teachers feel somewhat insecure with the new types of reporting to parents. Because so much more is now known than formerly about how children learn, grow and develop, that increased knowledge has made reporting more difficult for it is almost impossible to describe a child's achievement by use of a few symbols. Teachers generally feel unable to present a complete and true picture of all that is happening to and with the child. Parents feel they are in strange territory when trying to understand the meaning of reports so different from the ones they had in school.

Teachers often find themselves unable to accept newer concepts in education because they are the products of a different kind of education. Frequently they find that their training and experiences have not prepared them to use newer types of reporting. Sometimes the feeling of

insecurity becomes so strong on the part of both teachers and parents that, as Eloise C. Keebler[14] says, both groups long to go back to the "good old days."

A carefully written communication requires much thought and consideration and often must be rewritten and then edited by the principal. Statements in writing must be carefully prepared especially if they are to become a part of a child's permanent record. In many cases the teacher lacks the time or the ability or both to write such meaningful statements that they say exactly what the teacher wants to convey to the parents.

In preparing her reports the teacher will want to have sufficient evidence to support them. Daily grades, test grades and other forms of measurement that she has assembled will in large measure provide this evidence.

But, assuming that the teachers are thoroughly convinced of the merits of the newer types of reporting and feel capable of making such reports as well as having sufficient time to do so, there is still the problem of getting the public to accept the change. Schools cannot plunge into new programs. Educators can be sure that

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14. Eloise C. Keebler, "Written Communications," Reporting on Growth of Children, Bulletin 62, Association for Childhood Education, International, (Washington, D.C., 1953), p. 21.

parents want what is best for their children, but they may differ in their thinking in regards to what is best. As James L. Hymes says, ". . . not all parents are as eager for change in education as they are for new cook stoves."[15]

With our expanding population and the increasingly larger classes, the teacher is less and less likely to know the parents of the pupils. The establishment of larger unit districts has resulted in the discontinuance of many small attendance centers. These unit schools are usually located in a central place and the children are brought in by bus. There are doubtless many advantages in such a set-up. However this reduces the opportunities for teachers and parents to become acquainted, making the problem of reporting to parents more difficult and acute.

In spite of the problems involved, progress in reporting is being made and will continue to be made. Some years ago this writer was a member of a committee appointed to prepare and submit a sample report card to the Superintendent of Schools in Villa Grove, Illinois. The card was developed as a community project by the teachers and the parents in the district. The contemplated changes were known by the parents in the town and fully

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15. Hymes, op. cit., p. 50.

understood. The sample report card was accepted with only a few changes by the superintendent of schools and it is being used today by the district with pleasing results.

CHAPTER V

RELATION OF SCHOOL RECORDS TO REPORTS TO PARENTS

Among other things, the child's cumulative record should probably contain such items as the following included in a suggested list prepared for use in an Education[16] class at Eastern Illinois State College, Charleston, Illinois:

1. Physical

   Cleanliness, growth, nutrition, disease, accidents, hearing.

2. Emotional

   Worries (what and the extent of), experiences (happy--unhappy), temperament, evidences of tension (temper tantrums, nail biting, thumb sucking, day dreaming, bragging, bullying).

3. Educational

   Ability to learn, achievement in content subjects and fundamental skills.

4. Maturity

   Readiness for school work.

5. Social

   Ability to get along with others.

6. Personal

   Attitudes, purposes or goals, interests, likes, dislikes, speech defects, special abilities.

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16. Education 324, Eastern Illinois State College, Charleston, Illinois.

7. Behavior

> To and from school, on the playgrounds, in the school buildings, at home, and in other places.

Some reports include very few of these items; others are more complete. As Francis S. Sobel[17] has suggested, achievement is never a simple subject and may be evaluated from various angles. School requirements include factors other than the subject matter and teacher's marks.

In view of the enlarged school program, records now contain much information concerning the social, emotional, and physical growth of children as well as their academic progress. It seems advisable to share these findings with the parent in order to make the fullest use possible of the time, money, and effort spent in assembling the data. Since some of the items included in the records are of such a personal nature, they could best be discussed in a conference between parent and teacher. In using the school records, information should never be given parents concerning any child other than their own and comparisons between children should never be made. Care should be taken to present the information in such a way that the

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17. Francis S. Sobel, Teachers Marks and Objective Tests as Indices of School Adjustment, "Contributions to Education," No. 674, (Teachers College, Columbia University, Bureau of Publications, New York, 1936).

parent will thoroughly understand it. At the same time, the school will have to be very careful not to give out information that might be used to harm the child.

CHAPTER VI

WHAT SHOULD BE REPORTED TO PARENTS?

A report to parents reflects the philosophy of the school and the teachers in the school. Each of the items upon which the pupil is rated represents something that the school and the teachers believe to be important in the education of a child. Each school then reports to the parents what is considered most vital in the formative years in the growth of the pupil.

In the early colonial days when the home and family life met most of the vital needs of childhood, the school functioned mainly to teach the three R's. Schools of that period could quite adequately report pupil progress by either per cents or letter symbols. These symbols indicated how a child ranked in the class according to fixed standards of achievement for the grade. The symbols with 100 per cent representing perfection showed the parents how their children rated in relation to perfection. When letters instead of per cents were used, they adequately conveyed the same information. Furthermore little was known about the learning process, individual differences, and such factors as interest and emotional conditions. Many parents and teachers felt that such a system of reporting was

satisfactory.

Later on some schools began to believe that other things besides academic skills were important. They began to include such items as health and work habits and how the pupil got along with others.

As the number of items to be reported increased, a check system came into use. Many hours of careful consideration were needed to check all the items with fairness and justice.

As the modern American home evolved and the urban population grew the school began to take on many new responsibilities. Social living became extremely important. Vocational skills in a mechanized world were a necessity. In order to preserve the health of the children, clinics of various kinds were set up within the schools. The schools began to realize the importance of maintaining the child's emotional stability and mental health. The school psychiatrist along with the school nurse and doctor was able to detect signs of emotional disturbance in children. In many instances they gave invaluable aid in diagnosing the reasons for behavior problems and suggesting remedies.

With all this new wealth of learning about how a child grows and develops, thinking teachers felt keenly

the need to help parents see these factors in their child's life. Thus the parents might be made more sympathetic and understanding with the child and his problems. All this is a long way removed from the simple school of colonial days when the teacher and parent both felt secure in their belief that schools existed only to teach the three R's. Today even the academic area of reporting is no longer the simple thing it was once assumed to be. Parents are interested not only in the child's present academic achievements but also in his future growth. In an article by a parent, Mrs. Edna Long states:

> There is one kind of report I value above all others. It is the kind that not only tells me something of my child's growth now but as it may be. 'Stephen does not show much leadership in the classroom activities now, but there is something about him that leads me to think he could be a leader.' 'Have you thought of an art career for your daughter, Lenore? Perhaps in dress designing. She likes to sew.' Yes, the best reports are those which leave a door ajar into the future.[18]

At a conference held at the University of Illinois on December 7, 1951, the Illinois Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development suggested these items as the characteristics of good reporting:

a. It makes available the information the school has about children that the parents want, when

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18. Edna Long, "On the Receiving End--A Parent Speaks," Reporting on the Growth of Children, Bulletin 62, Association for Childhood Education, International (Washington, D.C., 1953), p. 10.

they want it and in the way they want it.

b. It makes possible for the school to get from parents the significant information it needs about pupils it can get from no other sources.

c. It provides the means for helping the school realize parents' anxieties about and hopes for their children.

d. It gives the school the opportunity for helping parents become aware of needs, weaknesses, strengths, and other characteristics of their children that they had not previously recognized.

e. It opens up means by which the school may help parents learn how they can best meet their children's educational needs with their resources.

f. It makes pupils feel secure, successful, and important in school.

g. In short, it furnishes the setting for effective home-school cooperation based upon:
    1. Shared information;
    2. Shared concerns and goals;
    3. Shared responsibility for wholesome pupil growth, development and learning.[19]

A questionnaire sent by the writer to the parents of her pupils in the first grade at Tuscola, Illinois, asked, among other questions, "What would you like to have your school tell you about your child's progress?"[20] A few of their responses will illustrate the parental view toward school reporting:

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19. Report of Illinois Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development Conference, University of Illinois, December 7, 1951, p. 2.

20. Nellie Prescott, "What Parents Want in Reporting Pupil Progress of Children in School," Survey, First Grade, Tuscola, Illinois, February, 1954.

1. A child's ability to grasp fundamentals, whether his progress is normal, and where he needs help the most.

2. The satisfactory-unsatisfactory report gives us no knowledge as to the subject in which our child excels or needs help.

3. As nearly everything as possible.

4. How he rates with other children of his class, his conduct, and his initiative in class.

Walter A. LeBaron[21] of the State Education Department of New York, writing in the Elementary School Journal in 1951, suggested that it is possible to tell some parents more than others. He feels that whenever possible parents should be informed on what basis the teacher's evaluation has been made, whether it is progress commensurate with the ability of the child, or progress in relation to the relative capacity of children of his own age. "More and more parents realize all children are different, not only in height, weight, and age but also in maturation tempo. . . The report should tell the truth and be specific. No amount of reporting that is in the nature of glittering generalities can contribute much to these ends." He further states that often information given to the teacher by the parent may be more important than that given to the parent by the teacher.

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21. Walter A. LeBaron, "What Shall We Tell the Parents?", Elementary School Journal, 51:322-26, February, 1951.

The parent usually knows the child more intimately than the teacher and has had the opportunity to observe him in many different situations. Generally the child feels freer to express his true personality in the home than in the more formalized atmosphere of the school. Because of this, the parent can help interpret the child to the teacher.

CHAPTER VII

WHEN AND HOW SHOULD REPORTS BE MADE TO PARENTS

There is no one right way of reporting to parents. There are many ways possible, and these ways depend on the school's philosophy. Not all schools have reached the same level of development and hence are not yet ready to fully accept the newer ways of reporting. As schools study the problem, parents and teachers, working and planning together, may be able to bring about the changes in reporting they both desire. Any method will be valuable only insofar as the teachers and parents believe in its usefulness. A perfect reporting instrument quite possibly will never be devised. Reporting devices should reflect the changing concepts of the purpose and methods of education. Improvements in communication will always be sought by earnest parents and teachers. A static complacency with things as they are would shut out all chance for growth. It is only through growth that a better reporting system can emerge.

Although there are many ways of reporting to parents, very few schools depend upon a single method. Many schools use a combination of two or more of the following ways:

1. REPORT CARDS. A report card is generally accepted as a medium of reporting pupil progress. Most of

the newer types contain a comprehensive number of items on which to rate the pupil, and may combine academic achievement reports with a rating on character and personality traits. Space for written comments is usually provided where the teacher may make specific reference to the individual child's problems or weaknesses. This space will also be used for special commendations whenever possible. A well planned report card in booklet form provides a continuity of reporting that is valuable for both teacher and parent. It gives both groups "something in writing" that fills the need for tangible evidence and helps to give the feeling of security.

Mrs. Walter Ferguson, reporting in the Pittsburgh Press, humorously suggested this need for tangible evidence: "Then too, we must always consider parental pride. Talks with teachers certainly are sensible and desirable, but what have you got to convince the neighbors that Jimmy is making progress? Suppose Uncle Oscar drops in. He will never be impressed by what you say. It will require some plain writing on a card, to make him realize Jimmy is an unusual child."[22]

22. Mrs. Walter Ferguson, "No Report Cards?" Pittsburgh Press, February 11, 1954.

2. CONFERENCES. The conference may be between a teacher and a parent, or between a teacher and a group of parents. The individual conference may be used to discuss the problems of a particular child while in the group conference problems of child growth and development may be brought out. In most cases the conference should probably be held at the school for best results. Here the teacher has the data available to make the conference much more informative for the parent. The parent may be given an opportunity to see his child at work. Such a procedure gives the parent a better idea of what the school is trying to accomplish. These conferences help the teacher understand the child's background and may serve as a basis of establishing friendly relations between parent and teacher.

However this type of reporting has certain weaknesses. Many times there is no written record for later reference. A suggested remedy would be to use the conference as a supplement to other forms of reporting. The time necessary for individual conferences is hard to find. Sometimes the teacher is not trained sufficiently to carry on an effective conference. An in-service training program could be very helpful in preparing teachers for this type of reporting.

3. PERSONAL LETTER. In some schools letters are written to parents telling about the progress of their children. This device gained favor for a while, but it was found to be very time-consuming and had the disadvantage of providing only one-way communication. Many teachers feel that they cannot express themselves adequately in writing. The statements should be carefully chosen, and the teacher should present sufficient evidence to back them up.

4. PERSONAL HOME VISITS. Home visits are sometimes advisable when some particular problem affecting the child has developed. Personal visits give the teacher some knowledge of home conditions and may help the teacher to better understand the child. They may serve to make the teacher more sympathetic toward the child and his problems. However teachers frequently find the parents on the defensive, thinking they have come to "snoop". Unless the visit is necessitated by an immediate situation, it is generally wise to plan visits beforehand, laying some groundwork so that such an impression may be eliminated. All home visiting requires time, and because of many factors involved, some superintendents prefer that the teachers not make home visits but hold all conferences at the school. Mr. A. L. Harlow[23], superintendent of Hoover School near

23. A. L. Harlow, Superintendent of School District 157, Calumet City, Illinois, April, 1955.

Calumet City, Illinois, said in a personal interview with the writer that he preferred that his teachers make home visits only when other methods fail.

5. TELEPHONE CALLS. Telephone calls have the advantage of providing immediate communication with the home. They are especially useful when an emergency arises concerning a child or for making conference arrangements with the parents. Because of possible lack of privacy however, they are not suitable for lengthy discussions of the child's problems. Telephone conversations in many instances make it hard to interpret the parent's reaction to the subject under discussion.

6. PUPIL EVALUATION. Some schools feel the pupil should have a part in evaluating his own work insofar as he is capable. Teachers may prepare a progress report in conference with the pupil, asking him to help in the appraisal of his work. The teacher may explain the report which she has prepared to the pupil so that he may help his parents to better understand his strengths and weaknesses.

As we have seen, there are methods of reporting that can be adapted to the needs of individual school systems. The Office of Education[24] has pointed out that

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24. Federal Security Agency, Office of Education, "Periodic Reports of Children's Progress," Bulletin IX, (Washington, D.C., September, 1948).

there are wide differences in content and methods of reporting. The survey conducted by this office was a summary of reports covering fifty-eight public school systems and seven laboratory schools. In general, however, the reports cover a child's growth in skills, appreciations, social habits, attitudes, and provide space for comments by teachers and replies from the parents.

Four reports per year at nine week intervals are most widely used, as judged from the writer's own study of report cards collected from various sections of the country. The quality of the report rather than its frequency would appear to be the more important consideration.

CHAPTER VIII

PROCEDURES FOR IMPROVING REPORTS TO PARENTS

It seems authorities are quite generally agreed that when a school wishes to make a change in its reporting system, it should carefully consider two "musts" before beginning the change. First, the majority of the parents, teachers, and administrators must be aware of the inadequacies of the present system and be interested in formulating a new method of reporting. They must be eager to find the method best suited to their needs. Second, parents, teachers, and administrators must be represented on the committees from the beginning, and care must be taken that the people selected are truly representative of the community and faculty.

With these two facts in mind, the schools of Stanislaus County[25], California, began their study. Their report card revision committee, made up of parents, teachers, and administrators, held community meetings and then sent out the following questionnaire:

1. Do you feel there is a need to change our present report card?

2. (a) Would you like to have your child graded

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25. Margaret Rasmussen, "In a County School System," Reporting on Growth of Children, Bulletin 62, Association for Childhood Education, International, (Washington, D.C., 1953), p. 40.

on his ability?

(b) Would you like to have your child's ability compared with his classmates?

3. Would you prefer a combination of parent-teacher conferences and report cards?

4. What services would you like the school to provide that are not provided at the present time?

Working out the details of the final report involves much thinking, planning, and revision. Very few schools can satisfactorily use a plan developed for another. Some schools accumulate a variety of reporting forms and, using them as guides, construct one for their own use, combining those features that best satisfy their needs. In most instances this method is perhaps much better than the adoption of a standardized form.

No one report system can be said to be superior for each school determines the method of reporting that best suits its philosophy and community needs. Some of the basic principles that are helpful in guiding local school systems have been stated in a comprehensive list by E. C. Bolmeier of Duke University:

1. The marking and reporting system should be in harmony with the philosophy of education held by the school for which the reporting system is to be used.

2. The marking and reporting system should be

designed and utilized primarily for the purpose of benefiting the pupil rather than the teacher.

3. The marking and reporting system should be developed democratically with the cooperative participation of the persons concerned.

4. The marking and reporting system should be sufficiently analytical to be meaningful and informative to pupils, parents, and counsellors.

5. The number and nature of the factors to be marked should bear a relationship to objectives which are considered germane to the course.

6. Each factor on the appraisal report should be marked with symbols which are immediately meaningful to all persons who have occasion to review the report.

7. The frequency of preparing reports and submitting them to the homes should be determined on the basis of relative values.

8. The manner in which the appraisal reports are submitted to the parents should be determined by the relative importance of economy and the assurance that they reach their intended destination.

9. The appraisal reports may be used to compute whatever final marks are required but not to revive the antiquated principle of competition.

10. The marking and reporting system should be evaluated continuously and modified, when deemed desirable, in accordance with the same democratic principles by which it was originally designed.[26]

But, as previously stated, any report is only as useful as teachers and parents make it. An article on the

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26. E. C. Bolmeier, "Principles Pertaining to Marking and Reporting Pupil Progress," School Review, 59:16-24, January, 1951.

subject by Mary Harbage emphasizes the same point in these words: "Let me hasten to say that any system of reporting, old or new, can be well used or it can be misused. . . The only standard a school can honestly set up is to start with each child where he is and take him as far as he can go."[27]

27. Harbage, op. cit., p. 29.

CHAPTER IX

EVALUATION OF REPORTS TO PARENTS

Whether a report is serving its purpose is best determined by its effects:

1. ON THE PUPILS. Does the report help the pupil to understand his own strengths and weaknesses?
2. ON THE PARENTS. Do they understand their child better, and become more aware of his capabilities, limitations, and needs?
3. ON THE TEACHERS. Does the report help the teacher to recognize the needs of the student so that she may aid him?

Considerable material can be found on how the parents and teachers feel as will be shown later, but very little of the literature deals with the effects of reports upon pupils. The best study that could be found on pupils' reaction to a reporting system was that conducted by Anderson and Steadman[28] at River Forest, Illinois. This system uses parent-teacher conferences as the basis of reporting. With the exception of grade eight, no formal reports are sent from the school unless special circumstances

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28. Robert H. Anderson and Edward R. Steadman, "Pupils' Reaction to a Reporting System," Elementary School Journal, 51:141-2, November, 1950.

require them. The teacher holds at least two conferences with the parent during the year and the record of these meetings is kept in the pupil's cumulative records. In grade eight, the only departmentalized grade in River Forest, the conference system would be impractical because of lack of time; so a written report is sent home three times a year. The report has a letter mark for the subject grade, check marks for "acceptable work" or "needs improvement" in various areas, and provision for written comments.

The responses of sixty-two per cent of the girls and fifty-four per cent of the boys showed that they would prefer the use of an achievement record in the seventh grade similar to that used in grade eight. They felt that such a record would help them to better understand their strengths and weaknesses and to make the transition from the grades to high school less difficult. Pupils who were satisfied with parent-teacher conferences only said that too much stress would be put on marks which, in turn, would result in a competitive race for grades.

The majority of the pupils indicated they would like to know their own strengths and weaknesses. The authors felt that pupil-teacher conferences might accomplish this goal better than the achievement record used by the eighth

grade. The students themselves stated that the pupil-teacher conference might help to remove the stress placed upon marks by parents. They wondered why educators cannot find a way to eliminate the competitive reports given to parents.

Parents are generally more willing to accept a new type of reporting system if they have had a part in its development. From a school in Hillsborough County, Florida, this opinion comes: "Parents have come to have confidence in the new system because it was introduced so gradually. . . Wherever possible, parent cooperation has been enlisted by seeking parent participation on committees or group studies."[29]

In 1950, Tacoma, Washington, adopted the combined conference and written report, with the final report of the year a written one. Parent-teacher conferences were used for the other two reporting periods. "Enthusiastic parent reaction to the conference plan has been largely due to their inclusion in all the planning."[30]

The superintendent of schools at Dickinson, North

29. Susan Dowdell, "Making the Grade with Parents," N.E.A. Journal, 42:214-15, April, 1953.

30. Irma Hazen, "Making the Grade with Parents," N.E.A. Journal, 42:216, April, 1953.

Dakota, where the traditional report card was discarded in 1948, writes: "A survey reveals that well over 75% of the parents and all the teachers support the system without qualification."[31]

In Tuscaloosa, Alabama, a change was made in report forms. The new forms provided for checking the pupil's growth in personality development and general citizenship. Parent-teacher conferences were also included in the new plan. "The acceptance of our present reporting system can be credited to cooperative efforts and improved understanding."[32]

Some parents are not sold on the letter to parent idea alone as an adequate report of progress. This dissatisfaction was revealed by an article[33] that was published recently in one of the Chicago newspapers giving a reporter's account of a meeting of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. Five parents from a school near Chicago, Illinois, were on a panel. The question was the graded report versus an essay type of report.

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31. A. L. Hagen, "Making the Grade with Parents," N.E.A. Journal, 42:216, April, 1953.

32. J. H. Hadley, "Making the Grade with Parents," N.E.A. Journal, 42:214, April, 1953.

33. Shirley Lowry, "Report Cards Called Boost to Parents' Ego," Chicago Daily Tribune, March 8, 1955.

The majority of the parents on the panel felt that the graded report presented more concrete evidence of the achievements of their children. The past experience of these parents enabled them to understand such a report better.

Most parents see the value of a report that measures a child according to his own ability rather than by comparing him with other children. Some parents, however, still like the idea of some competition among students. "Personally, I hope that they don't leave competition entirely out when they report to me about my children."[34]

While some parents may object to the newer trends in reporting, the literature points to a gradual acceptance of some method that reports more than academic achievement.

The more modern methods of reporting are a challenge to a teacher. She must constantly review her teaching in the light of social progress, personality traits, and spiritual values. No longer is reporting a smug ABC affair based only on the marks made in term examination. The newer system takes more time. But most conscientious teachers are willing to devote a full measure of time to the best interests of pupils. A sixth grade teacher in a

34. Long, op. cit., p. 12.

Missouri school has summed up the effects of the newer trends on teachers by her own self-evaluation after sending out a report. These are her checks on herself:

1. Am I enthusiastic?
2. Do I resent supervision?
3. Am I growing professionally?
4. Are my children happy?
5. Am I stressing spiritual values?
6. Is my classroom attractive?
7. Do children and visitors feel welcome and at ease?[35]

If a teacher can answer these seven questions in the affirmative, then she may feel that she too has profited from the newer methods of reporting.

Any school interested in evaluating the efficiency of its home-school relations program would do well to review the list of thirty-five questions suggested by James L. Hymes[36] as criteria for measuring its effectiveness. Most of the questions have detailed sub-statements making them too long to include here. The items deal with qualitative as well as quantitative criteria. Even if a school can give satisfactory answers to all the questions the task of developing better home-school relations is not complete. "All of these suggestions are

35. Birdie Flanakin, "Follow-up Steps," N.E.A. Journal, 42:262, May, 1953.

36. Hymes, op. cit., pp. 226-31.

a beginning, rather than an end. Home-school relations is a new field. Very little research and experimentation are specific and peculiar and private to it alone. When you work in this field you need your imagination and creativity much more than you need your memory."[37]

37. Ibid., pp. 231-2.

CHAPTER X

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

We have come a long way from the ornate report card of years ago. Such reports must have been satisfying to the children of that time because some of them have been carefully preserved with the other family treasures. Report cards today are not so decorative but some of them might well be regarded more highly than were the old-fashioned ones. A card that tells the parents not only what their child is accomplishing now, but what his aptitudes and abilities are, and a card that considers the mental, physical, social, and emotional development as well, is truly worthwhile.

A good report form will not cure all the ills of teaching. It is not an end but only a means to an end. The card is not infallible. An article in the New York Times Magazine[38] in 1952 pointed out this fact. The writer stated that administrators and leaders in educational theory were thinking about the problems of improving home-school relations. It is impossible to tell what a child is like by looking at marks on a report. Teachers attempt by

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38. Dorothy Barclay, "Report Cards in Home-School Relations," New York Times Magazine, December 21, 1952, page 30.

the use of a report to evaluate the child to the best of their ability. The evaluation, however, in many instances, is not complete.

It is extremely important that schools maintain good public relations. It is not enough to sit and wait until parents come to the superintendent's office to ask questions. Answers and information ought to be given as soon as the questions arise. Leaflets written by the teachers or administrators and pupil newsletters may assist in answering the parents' questions. "Letters to the Editor" in local newspapers might be watched carefully as they often reveal dissatisfaction with existing conditions. Doctor Harold C. Hand[39] feels that there should be no guess work about the dissatisfactions of parents and suggests a poll to reveal definite areas of satisfaction and dissatisfaction.

In summary of this study the writer offers the following recommendations:

1. Keep in mind that most parents love their children dearly. They have made many sacrifices of time and money in their behalf and they will continue to do so whenever they see the necessity

39. Dr. Harold C. Hand, What People Think About Their Schools (Yonkers, New York: World Book Company, 1948).

and value of such sacrifices.

2. Know as much about the child and his parents as possible. Try to establish a friendly relationship and let the parent know that you are keenly interested in his child's welfare.
3. Make the parent feel at ease and let him know that he is welcome to visit the classroom at any time.
4. Ask parents their opinions. Don't wait for them to express their grievances. When difficulties do arise, never forget that there are two sides to every question.
5. When you feel that changes should be made, make sure that others concerned share your opinion. If they don't, review your opinion very carefully. Perhaps it needs to be revised.
6. Include parents from the beginning in any committees for formulating a new system of reporting. Sharing the problems with them works wonders in home-school relations.
7. Proceed cautiously with all proposals for change. Frequently parents are accustomed to one way of doing things. In this case it might be a good

policy not to change the original method but only to add to it. This approach will usually eliminate parental anxiety, for it suggests improvements instead of changes. If the new methods are really worthwhile, the old will become less and less important.

8. Parents have a right to know about the progress of their child. They deserve respect and cooperation. The school should share with them all the information which will help them in understanding their child.

9. Not all parents are alike. Be aware of that fact when working with them.

10. Many parents lack confidence in dealing with their own children. A word of praise from the teacher gives them reassurance. Give them a good word whenever you can.

11. Remember that your rating of a child is not the last word. Consider this when in conference with parents.

12. Good home-school relations pay dividends for the school as well as for the parents. Try to make them as wholesome and satisfying as possible.

If the teacher tries to keep these recommendations

in mind, she should find her work more pleasant because she will feel she has the confidence of the parents and the child. Where there are better home-school relationships the child has a better chance to develop fully.

"Probably the most important factor in this modern practice of evaluating children's progress is that it creates a friendly three-way partnership between parents, child, and teacher. And how good it must be for a child to think, 'My Mother and Father and my Teacher and I like one another--and they are all interested in me!'"[40]

40. Harbage, op. cit., p. 30.

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